

Dear Sir/Madam:

We are writing to provide background information to highlight critical safety components of purposeful aquatics, including learn-to-swim programs, lifeguard training, aquatic therapy, water exercise, lap swimming, and competitive swimming. During this time of crisis, public health and policy leaders are charged with making tough decisions. As you work to implement, establish, maintain, and carefully roll back well-reasoned and science-based policies to control the spread of COVID-19, we hope this additional information will help you understand many factors that differentiate purposeful aquatics from other youth and adult sports.

It is also critical to emphasize that purposeful aquatics should not be confused with socially focused pool activities. Swim lessons and lifeguard training teach indispensable safety skills that prevent drowning, which is a significant cause of death, especially in children.ⁱ Many jurisdictions have recognized the critical importance of purposeful aquatics. For example, California recently established swim schools as essential businesses.ⁱⁱ Furthermore, there are many physical and mental health benefits involved in lap swimming, water exercise, and aquatic therapy, especially for disabled or older people who use pools for their only safe form of exercise. Competitive aquatics has many additional gains, including team building, education, and representation of teams and even the nation.

The CDC states, “CDC is not aware of any scientific reports of the virus that causes COVID-19 spreading to people through the water in pools, hot tubs, water playgrounds, or other treated aquatic venues.”ⁱⁱⁱ Further, trained swimmers naturally distance themselves, and they exhale under the water, which is a chlorinated environment. Proper operation, maintenance, and disinfection (e.g., with chlorine and bromine) of pools and hot tubs should remove or inactivate the virus that causes COVID-19.

Purposeful aquatics activities are easily modified to include safe distancing, restricted use of locker rooms, and limited group size. During swim practices, modifications can establish little close contact between swimmers, even with multiple swimmers in each lane, which is paramount in reducing viral transmission.^{iv} Close contact during passing is limited to fractions of a second. Limited sized swim lessons can also allow for spacing.^v Swim instructors, who usually can stand during in water instruction, can wear masks and face shields. Moreover, these activities are all monitored by non-participants such as instructors, coaches, and lifeguards, who can ensure safety guidelines are followed. USA Swimming and the Aquatics Coalition have provided science-based guidance to help pool facilities reduce risks of COVID-19 transmission.^{vi}

The Aquatics Coalition has worked to better understand risks and identify outbreaks on swim teams and in aquatics facilities. While COVID-19 cases have been identified, they are generally explained by close interactions outside of the facilities, usually with household members. Out of 126 cases reported by facilities surveyed, only one resulted from a known exposure from an aquatics activity (a swim lesson).

Indoor pools also generally have superior ventilation systems, compared to other indoor environments, designed to treat some of the harshest air. For many years now, designers have been finding ways to increase air turnovers, minimize velocity, and introduce fresh air as needed. Recent studies have found that a relative humidity between 40-60% is ideal to create a healthy indoor space and minimize the spread of airborne viruses.^{vii,viii} Indoor pools are designed to maintain these values. So, while proper safety procedures must be followed to reduce the spread of diseases, indoor pools give a good starting point to provide safe indoor recreation and exercise.

We acknowledge that with high transmission rates in some locations, difficult decisions must be made to protect public health. However, given the critical nature of purposeful aquatics, along with the safety inherent with strict guidelines in our chlorinated environments, as well as state-of-the-art ventilation efforts in indoor pools, we hope that you will evaluate related restrictions in light of the information provided here. Please feel free to contact us with any questions.

Sincerely,



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2004 Olympic silver medalist in swimming



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ⁱ <https://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/water-safety/waterinjuries-factsheet.html>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.usswimschools.org/2020/12/learning-to-swim-deemed-essential-in-california/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/parks-rec/aquatic-venues.html>

^{iv} <https://www.usaswimming.org/docs/default-source/coronavirus-resources---updated/facilityreopeningv3.pdf>

^v https://www.usswimschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/USSSA_COVID19ActionPlan_V2-1.pdf

^{vi} <http://www.aquatics-coalition.org>

^{vii} <https://aaqr.org/articles/aaqr-20-06-covid-0302>

^{viii} <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/08/200820102503.htm>